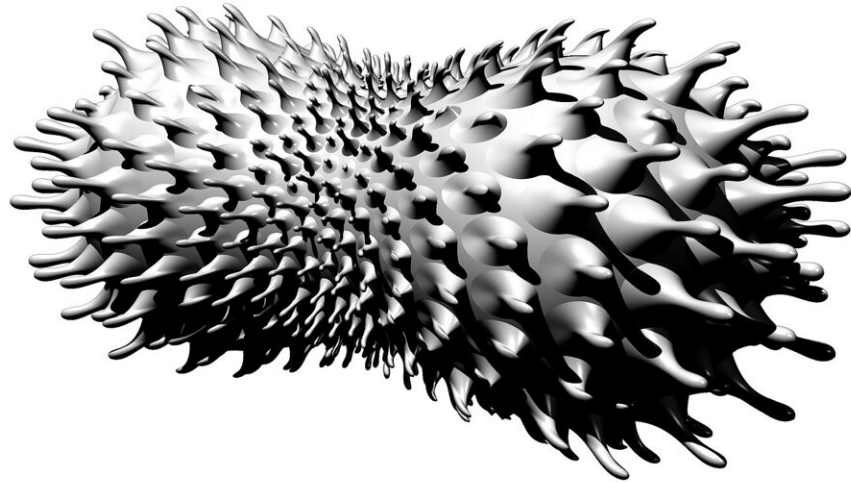


After mpox outbreak, vaccinations cratered. Now, officials are renewing the push

May 16 2023, by Christian Martinez



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Late last summer, the mpox outbreak in California peaked, with the state reporting an average of nearly 100 new cases per day in August.

Amid a robust vaccination campaign, new infections dropped sharply

and quickly.

By September, California was reporting an average of about 50 new cases per day, with that rate dropping below 10 by the end of the next month.

As case rates fell, so did vaccination rates. Health officials across the state are now renewing their push to vaccinate [vulnerable people](#), including members of the LGBTQ+ community, ahead of June Pride Month and summer events.

Mpox is rarely fatal but can cause painful rashes and lesions, as well as flu-like symptoms. It typically spreads through close skin-to-skin contact, which can include sex.

As of Friday, nearly 250 people in California have been hospitalized with mpox. Nationwide, roughly 30,400 cases have been reported, along with 42 deaths.

"As we head into the [summer months](#), and as we're heading into these celebrations, there may be more of these events that are happening that could potentially facilitate mpox transmission," said Andrea Kim, director of the vaccine preventable disease control program at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

Kim said that the outbreak began around the time of last year's Pride celebrations. As that part of the calendar rolls around again, [health officials](#) are emphasizing the need to get more people vaccinated.

Though anyone can catch the virus, many of the cases confirmed during last year's outbreak were among men who have sex with men.

"If we've learned anything from COVID, it's that if we all did the right

thing in the first place, it makes it a lot harder for these things to reemerge," said Craig Bowers, chief marketing and external affairs officer for APLA Health, a Los Angeles nonprofit that provides healthcare to the LGBTQ+ community.

Mpox cases have continued to decline since last summer. Most recently, L.A. County has been reporting about two new infections per week.

The World Health Organization on Thursday said that mpox should no longer be deemed a public health crisis.

But the disease can still spread. A recent, small cluster of cases has broken out in Chicago. The city reported 20 cases over the past four weeks after reporting none in the four weeks prior.

As the infection curve flattened, so did demand for shots, health officials said. Statewide as of Friday, nearly 300,000 people have received at least one dose of the recommended two-shot regimen, according to the California Department of Public Health. People who have received two shots are considered fully vaccinated and need no further shots.

"Right now, in the last few months, we really have only been vaccinating about 100 to 150 people a week," Kim said. "At our peak, we were at about 8,000 first doses in a week."

The low case rates and perceived lack of risk may be one reason that vaccination rates dropped so sharply, said Bowers of APLA Health, which has vaccinated around 4,000 people.

"Those are the people this time around that we'd like to reach—the people that never got it in the first place. They're the most vulnerable," Bowers said.

APLA will be at around 60 events between now and the fall to get more people vaccinated, Bowers said. Kim said the L.A. County health department will ramp up its messaging and presence at events.

The Los Angeles LGBT Center said it would also be hosting pop-up vaccine clinics.

"We're also trying to promote the message that the vaccine is, first of all, safe and effective," Kim said. "There's more and more data out there that the vaccine effectiveness is really high."

Public health officials in San Francisco and L.A. County are also renewing their mpox vaccination pushes.

"We want to make sure that everyone can enjoy a happy and healthy Pride," San Francisco [health](#) officer Dr. Susan Philip said in a recent statement. "If you received your first dose of the mpox vaccine, even if it was in the fall, it is not too late—now is a great time to get your second dose."

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